

“God’s Judgment and Wrath” From God’s Prophet Jeremiah

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Generally speaking, in 21st century American Christianity, God’s grace and love are exalted above all His other attributes in importance and prominence. Although these attributes of God are indeed magnificent and worthy of exaltation, the Scriptures do not exalt these attributes *above* God’s other attributes such as His longsuffering, justice, and wrath. The Bible describes God as the God of “truth” (John 14:6), “love” (1 John 4:8), and “fierce wrath” (Rev. 19:15). Any other god is an idol and not the one, true God.

The one, true God is all-powerful and just. He is awful, dreadful, and terrible in His wrath.

God could reduce us to nothing were He only to touch us with the end of His finger, as we know how dreadful is His power; nor is there any need for Him to thunder from heaven, for if He were only to show an angry countenance, it would be all over with us.¹

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is like a mirror in which we behold God’s vengeance on all the ungodly. God overthrew Sodom; but He does not proceed in the same way with other lands and nations; yet the same is the lot of all the unbelieving, of the despisers of God, and reprobates; for they are exposed to His vengeance, which they cannot escape, though it may be for a time suspended. (Jer. 50:40)²

God’s displays of judgment and wrath are just.

The Prophet Jeremiah, as though terrified, hid himself under the wings of God, for he saw that apostasy and every kind of wickedness prevailed everywhere throughout the land; he saw that the principal men of his nation were wicked despisers of God, and that they vainly boasted of their own descent, while yet destitute of all care for justice and uprightness. (Jer. 17:14)³

God so extols His own power that He yet would have Himself acknowledged to be just whenever He inflicts punishment on the ungodly; for as His severity often appears extreme, hence the Prophets, when they speak of acts of vengeance which God executes, at the same time add some testimony as to His judgment being righteous. (Jer. 45:10)⁴

➤ **Spiritual deafness, hardness of heart, and ingratitude provoke God’s vengeance.**

The source of all their wickedness was this: they hearkened not to the voice of the LORD. Had they gone astray and had God been silent, their fault might have been excused; but as God had daily sent prophets to them, who never ceased to cry in their

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, Vol. II, trans. Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 63.

² Vol. V, 183.

³ Vol. II, 365.

⁴ Vol. IV, 582.

hearing, and yet they continued deaf, their perverseness in their sinful courses was inexcusable. We see then that their sin was increased by the circumstance, that they refused to hear the voice of God. God had done His part in calling them back from the way of ruin, but they had been so obstinate as to disregard His favor, and they thus justly suffered not only for their impiety but also for their ingratitude and perverse wickedness. (Jer. 3: 24-25)⁵

The Jews had without any cause, no, even without any pretext and without shame, renounced God, who had been so bountiful toward them. Jeremiah also in an indirect manner reproved them because they refused to be instructed; for he commanded them to look on the fact itself, inasmuch as they were deaf or having ears they closed them against all instruction.⁶

When God chastises a city or a country with war, pestilence, or famine, while the evils continue there is dread and anxiety; most of those whom God thus afflicts sigh and groan and even howl; but as soon as some relaxation takes place, they shake off the yoke, and having no concern for their wickedness, they return again as dogs to their vomit. (Jer. 2:9)⁷

Since the time that Nebuchadnezzar had spoiled the city of Jerusalem and had taken from it everything valuable, those who remained had not ceased to add sins to sins, so that there was a larger portion of divine vengeance ready to fall on them. (Jer. 24:1-2)⁸

God would make His people ashamed because they valued Him less than girls are accustomed to value their jewelry. The necklaces of young women are indeed nothing but mere trifles, and yet we see that girls are so taken with them through a foolish passion that they value such trinkets more than their very life. "How then is it," says God, "that my people have forgotten Me? Is there to be found any such ornament? Can anything be found among the most valuable jewels and the most precious stones which can be compared with Me?" God shows by this comparison how perverted the minds of the Jews were, when they renounced and rejected a benefit so invaluable as to have God as their Father and to be prosperous under His dominion. (Jer. 2:33)⁹

God had never so bound Himself to any people or place that He was not at liberty to inflict punishment on the impiety of those who had despised His favors or profaned them by their ingratitude and their sins. God is ever at liberty to take vengeance on the ungodly and the ungrateful.¹⁰

➤ **Lawlessness provokes God's vengeance.**

Jeremiah said in effect, "Do you think that so many vices will be unpunished? You omit nothing to kindle God's wrath against you—you have polluted His Temple, you have

⁵ Vol. I., 197.

⁶ Vol. I., 137.

⁷ Vol. I., 86-87.

⁸ Vol. III, 221.

⁹ Vol. I., 139.

¹⁰ Vol. I, 382.

corrupted the whole of Divine worship, you have despised the law; and can you think that the Lord will perpetually spare you?" (Jer. 11:16-17)¹¹

There is no pardon left for us when we avowedly reject the yoke of God. And this ought to be carefully noticed, for we see how difficult it is to subject men even when they confess that the word of God is what they hear. Those who harden their necks are unworthy of mercy. (Jer. 19:14-15)¹²

➤ **False worship provokes God's vengeance.**

We hence learn how frivolous is the excuse of those who say that they follow what they have learned from the fathers and what has been delivered to them from the ancients and received by universal consent; for God declares that the destruction of the people would follow because they allowed themselves to be deceived by false prophets.¹³

➤ **Spiritual apathy and indifference provoke God's vengeance.**

God abhors the indifference of men who harden themselves against His threatenings and completely disregard His judgment. For if we acknowledge Him as God, His power as a judge ought not to be taken away. What does God's name mean? Doubtless they who imagine that God remains quiet in heaven and enjoys His leisure and rest, though they may not in words deny God, yet treat Him with mockery; there is in them at the same time no religion and no thought of a divine being. Let us then carefully notice this passage, in which the Prophet testifies that God is denied by us unless we are moved by His threatenings. All who trifle with the prophets do in their hearts say that there is no God. (Jer. 5:12)¹⁴

If God does not cease for a whole year to warn and exhort us, while at the same time His doctrine is despised by us, we become guilty of intolerable sin. (Jer. 25:3-5)¹⁵

➤ **God is a just judge, and He is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11).**

The Jews of Jeremiah's day suffered justly, for they had provoked the wrath of God.¹⁶ Until we from the heart repent, He ever sounds in our ears these words, *Still God will contend with you.*¹⁷

The Jews not only dared dishonestly and proudly to claim innocence for themselves, but also they did not hesitate to contend with God, and to suggest that He with too much severity oppressed them, and did not treat them justly, but announced a cruel sentence for the purpose of overwhelming them. God responds in effect, "I will really prove that I am a just judge and not a tyrant, that I execute just punishments according to the law,

¹¹ Vol. II, 103.

¹² Vol. II, 452-453.

¹³ Vol. II, 410.

¹⁴ Vol. I, 279.

¹⁵ Vol. III, 242.

¹⁶ Vol. I., 226.

¹⁷ Vol. I., 87.

and that I am not like a man in anger, who takes vengeance on his enemies and does so impulsively and rashly. I will show," He says, "that I am a just judge." (Jer. 2:35)¹⁸

All who thus perversely rebel and strive dishonestly and shamelessly to defend their own vices, contend at the same time with God; for false excuses have ever this tendency—to charge God with unjust severity. But we see what such men gain for themselves; for God shows that He will be at last their judge, and that He will openly discover the vices of those who thought that they could excuse themselves by evasions and by false charges against Himself. They then who thus obstinately resist God, must at last, according to what the Prophet declares, come to this end—that they will be constrained to acknowledge that God has not been too violently angry with them, but has only executed a just punishment.¹⁹

➤ **God is constrained to judge sinners; failure to do so would be to deny His own perfect character.**

An earthly judge may pardon the ungodly and worst of men; but this cannot be done by God; for whenever God pardons, He leads sinners to repentance; so that He never suffers sins to be unpunished. For he who repents becomes his own judge and thus anticipates God's judgment. Where then there is true conversion, God shows no indulgence to sins. But when persistency in sins is such, that they who are warned despise all instruction, it is impossible that God should forgive; as in that case He would renounce His own glory, which can never be. Should I not then visit them for this, says the Lord?²⁰

In Jeremiah 5:9 the LORD asks, "Shall I not punish *them* for these *things*?" "And shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?" God speaks after the manner of men, for He seeks no vengeance; and when He speaks of His soul, even this is not strictly suitable to Him; but there is here nothing obscure; for what is meant is that He is at enmity with wickedness, as it is said in Ps. 5:5, that He cannot bear iniquity. Since it is so, it follows that He must either be cast down from His celestial throne or punishment must be inflicted on the wicked, who remain perverse and set no end nor bounds to their sins. Whenever then delusion creeps over us and Satan seeks by his allurements to lead us to forget God's judgment, let this come to our senses and remember that God would not be God unless He were to punish sins. (Jer. 5:9)²¹

Men try in vain to exempt themselves from God's just judgment.

We find profane men in our day, who in like manner trifle with God; and when they cannot entirely despise what God threatens, they yet delay the time, and think that they gain something by putting off the day of vengeance. (Jer. 4:14)²²

➤ **Men deceive themselves by their own prosperity.**

¹⁸ Vol. I., 145.

¹⁹ Vol. I, 145-146.

²⁰ Vol. I., 273.

²¹ Vol. I., 273.

²² Vol. I., 218.

The Jews were deceived by their prosperity: The Jews in vain brought forward their own prosperity as a proof that God was propitious [favorable] towards them. On the contrary, a heavier vengeance is accumulated when the ungodly increasingly harden themselves while God is treating them with indulgence. (Jer. 12:1)²³

➤ **Men abuse God's patience and longsuffering and grace.**

Let us then learn not to abuse the patience of God: for though He may suspend for a time the punishment we deserve, yet when He sees that we go on in our wickedness, He will come to extreme measures and will deal with us without mercy as those who are past remedy. (Jer. 13:24)²⁴

Men try in vain to blame God for the calamities which befall them.

Jeremiah said in effect, "There is no reason for you to blame God or your adverse fortune, as you are accustomed to do and as all the heathens also do; for your own deeds have procured for you these calamities. Thus God will perform His office of a judge; and whatever may happen to you is to be ascribed to your own wickedness." (Jer. 4:18)²⁵

Religious hypocrites will be without excuse on the day of judgment; they will be judged more severely.

If we are without the knowledge of God, He will justly reprove us sharply at the last day, that we have been foolish and mad; for we have the means of knowing Him; and there is no excuse that we can plead for our ignorance, since God has not spoken to us in an obscure manner. But since God has at this day made Himself more fully known to us, it is a heavier condemnation to us and our punishment will thus be doubled if we know not God, who is so kind to us and deals with us so graciously.²⁶

God is armed against those before whom He has set His word, not only for one day but for many years, when He has found that He has labored in vain; and that when He is offended with their obstinate wickedness, there is no more any remedy. (Jer. 11:12)²⁷

The more clearly God makes known His truth, the less ground of excuse there is.²⁸

As to hypocrites, as there was no true repentance, so they never obtained pardon; but God delivered His own from eternal reproach when Christ the Redeemer appeared. (Jer. 23:40)²⁹

Paul says that the Gospel is a fatal aroma to many, but that it is nevertheless a sweet aroma before God (2 Cor. 2:16). It ought to be imputed to the fault of those who perish

²³ Vol. II, 121.

²⁴ Vol. II, 194.

²⁵ Vol. I., 227.

²⁶ Vol. I., 234.

²⁷ Vol. II, 91.

²⁸ Vol. II, 453.

²⁹ Vol. III, 219.

(not to God) that they receive not the doctrine of the Gospel to their own salvation. (Jer. 29:10)³⁰

A heavier condemnation and vengeance await those who have been faithfully taught what pleases God and what is right, and yet follow their own will, and are carried away by the passions and lusts of the flesh. In a word, Jeremiah points out the highest pitch of impiety, which is when people clearly and familiarly know what the will of God is and yet disregard it and shake off the yoke and thus show manifestly a contempt for the whole Law. (Jer. 32:23)³¹

The unbelieving and wicked will also have their day of reckoning before God's tribunal of justice.

It is the perpetual consolation of the Church that though God employs the wicked as scourges to chastise His people, yet the condition of the wicked is not better, for when they have triumphed for a moment, God will soon bring them to judgment. (Jer. 30:16)³²

God's judgments in the Old Testament serve as a warning to the rebellious and hypocritical today.

Since Shiloh and Jerusalem and so many celebrated cities where the gospel formerly flourished have been taken away from us, it is not to be doubted but that a dreadful vengeance and destruction await all those who reject the doctrine of salvation and despise the treasure of the gospel.³³

Fools scoff at God's judgments; the wise fear God and repent.

It was a great blindness, no, even madness, not to examine themselves when they were smitten by the hand of God; for conscience ought to have been to them like a thousand witnesses immediately condemning them; but hardly any one was found who examined his own life. (Jer. 16:10-13)³⁴

This is the rule of wisdom—to open our eyes to see God's judgments, which are hidden from the world: while others are drawn away by their lusts or sunk in their stupor. The Prophet Jeremiah teaches us that we are wise when we rightly consider what the Lord has made known to us in His word.³⁵ They are only truly wise who consider God's judgments before He openly executes them.³⁶

God reserves a special judgment for those who attack, explain away, and reject His Word.

³⁰ Vol. III, 428.

³¹ Vol. IV, 182-183.

³² Vol. IV, 33.

³³ Vol. I, 383.

³⁴ Vol. II, 313.

³⁵ Vol. I., 478

³⁶ Vol. I, 478.

A dreadful judgment is denounced on all those profane men who despise God's word and treat it with derision; for the Holy Spirit by the mouth of Jeremiah openly proclaims that God is made by them to be a liar. (Jer. 20:7)³⁷

Scripture is like a fire and a hammer: The LORD asks in Jeremiah 23:29: "Is not My word like a fire?" "And like a hammer *that* breaks the rock in pieces?"

God's word ever retains its own dignity; for if it happens to be despised by men, it cannot yet be deprived of its vigor and efficacy; if it be not wholesome for food, it will be like fire or like a hammer. Then these two comparisons belong to the wicked, for God's word has another sense when called fire with reference to the faithful, because it dries up and consumes the lusts of the flesh, as silver and gold are purified by fire. Hence the word of God is properly and fittingly called fire, even with regard to the faithful; but not a devouring but rather a refining fire. But when it comes to the reprobate, God's word must necessarily destroy them, for they receive not the grace that it offers to them. It may also be called a hammer, for it subdues the depraved affections of the flesh and such as are opposed to God even in the elect; but it does not break the elect, for they allow themselves to be subdued by it. But this *hammer* is said to break the stone or the rock, because the reprobate will not bear to be corrected; they must, therefore, be necessarily broken and destroyed. (Jer. 23:29)³⁸

The reprobate are themselves refractory [obstinately resistant to authority or control] against God, and thus His word becomes a hammer to break their heads, to shatter and destroy them. We now see the reason why God not only declares that He was angry with these ungodly despisers of God's word, but also denounces the same vengeance on their descendants. (Jer. 23:35)³⁹

When men reject the word of teaching, they cannot escape the other word, which denounces the judgment of God. Teaching appears useless when not received by men; but whoever despises His word will find at last, to his own ruin, that the denunciations by which God confirms and ratifies the authority of His word cannot possibly be made void; as, then, *they heard not the word which I had spoken to them, all the evils which I have pronounced against them* shall come upon them. (Jer. 35:17)⁴⁰

When, therefore, the unbelieving avoid the word of God, they are still constrained, willing or unwilling, to hear what they willfully reject, even that God will be their judge. (Jer. 43:8-10)⁴¹

God's present methods of judgment on earth

- **God sends calamities and disasters as a judgment and a trumpet call to repentance.**

Calamities are not by chance but proceed from God's hand, as though He gave a cup to drink. Now when He afflicts His own, they are constrained to drink as it were His wrath;

³⁷ Vol. III, 30.

³⁸ Vol. III, 199-200.

³⁹ Vol. III, 209.

⁴⁰ Vol. IV, 322.

⁴¹ Vol. IV, 512.

it is therefore a sour and a bitter cup. But the wicked shall hereafter drink poison. Even medicine, though displeasing to the taste because of its bitterness, is yet wholesome; but poison kills men, though its taste is like medicine. (Jer. 49:12)⁴²

He punished the Jews with sterility [infertile lands]; the drought of which the Prophet speaks was no doubt so uncommon, that the Jews might perceive, had they a particle of a sound mind, that God was at war with them. It often happens that not a drop of rain falls from heaven; for we see that many summers are hot and dry; there is no doubt but that God then reminds us of our sins and exhorts us to repent. (Jer. 3:3)⁴³

God confirmed Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian in the truth that He would be the author of the calamity: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am about to bring My words on this city for disaster and not for prosperity'" (Jer. 39:16). Had Jerusalem been taken by chance, Ebed-Melech might justly have feared; but having been taught that it was to happen through God's just judgment, Ebed-Melech would feel sure of his safety; for it would be in the power of the same God to save one man and even many, while He was destroying the whole people. This, then, is the reason why God declared that *He* was bringing His words for evil and not for good; for except Ebed-Melech had been convinced that the city and its inhabitants were in God's hand and power, he could never have been led to entertain good hope; but when he knew that the city would perish through the righteous vengeance of God, he would then be fully confident as to his own safety; for God promised to preserve him in the midst of the common ruin. (Jer. 39:15-18)⁴⁴

All punishments inflicted by God are called evils, as we find in Isaiah, "I am God, who creates light and darkness, life and death, good and evil" (Isa. 45:7).⁴⁵ Or, the New Kings James translation says: "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these *things*." Whatever evils happen to us, they ought to be ascribed to God's judgment and not to adverse fortune. The Prophet shows that as to the time past they had suffered nothing by chance, but that they had been punished because they had provoked God's wrath. (Jer. 42:11-12)⁴⁶

➤ **God takes away men's reason and give them over to a reprobate mind.**

God shows that such was the falling away among the whole community of Judah, that priests as well as prophets and all the chief men had departed from the true worship of God and from all uprightness. (Jer. 2:8)⁴⁷ The whole community was in a hopeless state when God gave up the priests and rulers to a reprobate mind; and there is no doubt but that the people had provoked God's vengeance, when every order, civil as well as religious, was thus corrupt. God then visited the people with deserved punishment, when He blinded the priests, the prophets, and the rulers.⁴⁸

⁴² Vol. V, 76.

⁴³ Vol. I., 158.

⁴⁴ Vol. IV, 438.

⁴⁵ Vol. IV, 438.

⁴⁶ Vol. IV, 490.

⁴⁷ Vol. I, 82.

⁴⁸ Vol. I, 82.

The Jews were not only senseless and stupid, but they were so destitute of all knowledge, that they were like stones or brute animals; they had not a particle of sound mind or of rational knowledge remaining in them.⁴⁹

Insensibility is a kind of drunkenness by which God dements men through His hidden judgment. It ought then to be noticed that whatever prudence and skill there is in the world, they are in such a way the gifts of God that whenever He pleases the wisest are blinded, and, like the drunken, they either go astray or fall. (Jer. 51:57)⁵⁰

➤ **God turns self-reliant men's defenses and strengths against them.**

As then the wicked set up security in opposition to God, the Prophet shows that there are many ways in His hand by which He can take the fugitives and those who seem to think that they can escape through their own astuteness. (Jer. 48:44)⁵¹

When any country is destitute of God's help, though it may excel in arms, in number, in wealth, and in wisdom, yet everything under heaven is of no avail without the blessing and favor of God. (Jer. 50:38)⁵²

➤ **God punishes the children of the rebellious to the third and fourth generation.**

In Jeremiah 16:10-13, we read: "And it shall be, when you show this people all these words, and they say to you, 'Why has the LORD pronounced all this great disaster against us? Or what *is* our iniquity? Or what *is* our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?' then you shall say to them, 'Because your fathers have forsaken Me,' says the LORD; 'they have walked after other gods and have served them and worshiped them, and have forsaken Me and not kept My law. 'And you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, each one follows the dictates of his own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me. 'Therefore I will cast you out of this land into a land that you do not know, neither you nor your fathers; and there you shall serve other gods day and night, where I will not show you favor.'"

It is no wonder that children are more grievously punished after iniquity has prevailed for many ages. (Jer. 16:10-13)⁵³ God teaches us in His law that He visits "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation" (Exod. 34:7; Num. 14:18; cf. Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9). As Paul says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

The Jews transmitted to their descendants whatever they devised as to their ungodly forms of worship. They were not only led away into evil through the whole course of their own lives, but that they also corrupted their children, for they left to them memorials of their own superstitions. (Jer. 17:3)⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Vol. I., 234.

⁵⁰ Vol. V, 284.

⁵¹ Vol. V, 48.

⁵² Vol. V, 181.

⁵³ Vol. II, 316.

⁵⁴ Vol. II, 338.

So also in our own day, our nation and its churches are reaping the consequences of the spiritual rebellion of the generations that have preceded us, as seen in the gross idolatry and immorality that so pervade our churches and society and the false doctrine and worship that prevail in the churches.

Let us remember the example of Sodom and Gomorrah, lest the same fiery judgment that befell those cities should befall us.

The LORD said, "Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw *fit*." (Ezekiel 16:49-50).

"Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 1:7).

Conclusion

The apostle John warns us that the great day of God's wrath is coming, and who will be able to stand? (Rev. 6:17). For Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, is He who "Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev. 19:16). Let us beware lest we be trampled underfoot in the horrid winepress of God's wrath, like the splattering grapes that are only fit for destruction. Let us flee the wrath that is to come (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7)!

Unless we are Christ's true disciples we are the most miserable of men, "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). For there is only One who can appease the awful and terrible wrath of God Almighty, even Jesus who endured the penalty that was rightfully ours on account of our sin. We must come to Him in all humility, bowing at His feet, begging Him to receive us unto Himself, placing our faith in Him alone and in His work on our behalf at Calvary. Trust in Him alone this day. For "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).